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AUTHOR McMahon, Agnes; Wallace, Mike
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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of research on the plans of multiracial primary schools in England to implement a series of innovations in the educational system. The Education Reform Acts of 1986 and 1988 instituted innovations which included: (1) a national curriculum; (2) nationally imposed salaries; (3) a national teacher appraisal scheme; (4) school budgets for staff development; and (5) monitoring of school performance. The research involved interviews with 22 Local Education Authority personnel about innovations being implemented in the schools, and interviews with 24 headteachers about a range of issues connected with development planning. The findings revealed that planning for change occurred alongside the planning that was required to maintain existing practice, and that the most significant factor affecting development planning was the large number of innovations that the schools were addressing. One of the main values of the development planning in most schools was the focusing of staff on shared priorities. Headteachers played a key role in the process of development planning, while the role of schools' governing bodies was a minor one. In general, school staff sought to inform parents about developments rather than gather their views beforehand. Several hypotheses about current development planning are suggested and recommendations for policymakers and school practitioners are offered. Nine references are cited. (BC)

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Planning for Development in Multiracial Primary Schools

Agnes McMahon and Mike Wallace

National Development Centre for
Educational Management and Policy,
School of Education,
University of Bristol,
35 Berkeley Square,
Bristol,
BS8 1JA,
England

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report on the initial findings of current research which is exploring how multiracial primary (elementary) schools in England plan to implement multiple innovations in a context of cultural diversity. A second aim of the research is to identify school planning processes and procedures that appear to be effective. The project has been funded by the Leverhulme Trust and runs from September 1990 to August 1992.

The rationale for the study was to determine how planning for development takes place in schools where headteachers (principals) and their staff are likely to be faced with implementing a very wide range of innovations. The majority of schools in England are currently in such a position because central government has introduced a radical restructuring programme through the 1986 and 1988 Education Acts. The main features of this programme that affect primary schools are:

- a national curriculum and national testing at ages 7 and 11;
- responsibility falling to headteachers and governors for the local management of schools, including the budget and the hiring and firing of staff;
- nationally imposed salaries, conditions of service and career ladders for all teaching staff;
- a national teacher appraisal (evaluation) scheme which includes classroom observation;
- school level budgets for staff development plus five school closure days available for training each year;
- regular monitoring and evaluation of school performance by local and national inspectors.

Schools have been allowed little time to implement these innovations which have been brought in since 1989 to a timetable determined by central government.

Arguably, staff in all schools in the primary sector currently face more innovations than their counterparts in secondary schools, since each teacher is likely to be implementing most subjects within the National Curriculum except a foreign language. In multiracial primary schools staff may have an even broader range of innovations to implement as they serve culturally diverse communities where religious and educational beliefs often differ widely.

Under Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act, schools which have pupils from ethnic minorities within the New Commonwealth generally receive support from the central government's Home Office towards their education. However, whereas this support used to be allocated in proportion to the number of children from the designated racial groups, the Home Office has changed the basis of this funding by requiring local authorities to submit proposals for special projects in a competitive bidding process based on the financial year. Most of these projects are expected to last no more than three years. If a bid is not successful schools may find themselves unable to renew a teacher's contract. The change in Section 11 funding arrangements affects planning in multiracial schools for the teaching of English as a second language, bilingual and cultural support, and the development of close home-school links. Consequently the most extensive range of innovations and therefore the most turbulent environment for planning probably exists in multiracial primary schools.

The pressure that schools face in implementing this range of innovations had been widely acknowledged and discussed. The Department of Education and Science (DES) has put forward a rationalistic solution which has been imposed upon the majority of schools in England, supported by most Local Education Authorities (LEAs). In order that they may gain a high measure of control over the change process schools are required annually to review priorities for development and draw up a written strategic plan for the year ahead. Typically this planning document will include details of aims, specific targets, the timetable for implementing various innovations, the staff members responsible for implementation, and the resources that have been allocated to each initiative. Once produced, the document should be used by school managers as a blueprint for the coming year. Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991) argue that the process of annual development planning is likely to result in changes in the school management system '...so that the management of change can become integral to the way the school conducts its affairs'. They claim that in consequence 'the schools' capacity to manage change is increased'. (p14)

Two assumptions which underpin much external advice about development planning are open to question. First, schools are seen to be in a position to control the number of innovations that they handle and the pace and timing of implementation. In practice this is frequently not the case as, at the present time, many innovations are imposed upon schools by central government and LEAs. Second, change is viewed as a process which may be managed systematically. Evidence from a recent study of curriculum planning in primary schools (Nias et al 1992) suggests that the change process was often '...neither sequential nor 'rational' in a linear sense'.

The project is testing hypotheses about planning for development which emerged from a recently completed exploratory study of multiple change in culturally homogeneous schools (Wallace 1991a). This work indicated that headteachers led an incremental process of planning for development at school level. Planning was actually more continual and responsive to changing circumstances than the annual cycle underpinning many development plans for schools that LEAs are introducing with the support of the Department of Education and Science (DES 1989). The model of 'flexible planning' (Wallace 1991b) developed in this study has provided a theoretical framework for the investigation of planning in multiracial primary schools (see Figure 1). The model has affinities with the notion of 'evolutionary planning' put forward by Louis and Miles (1990) and advocated by Fullan (1991), but emphasises the tension between long term planning and retaining flexibility in a context of externally imposed innovations. It incorporates three components, the most fundamental of which is a continuous process of creation, monitoring and adjustment of plans for the short, medium and long term. These plans roll forward over time, medium term plans being developed into more detailed short term plans and so on. Continual planning is dictated by the need for flexibility to respond at any time to spasmodic changes in information about external innovations and to short term crises (like widespread illness amongst staff) and longer term issues (such as a local shortage of teachers) that are not directly connected to these innovations. At the same time, schools have to deal with two overlapping cycles: the academic and financial years.

Fieldwork

Research is being carried out in three LEAs: a county containing several small cities, a small metropolitan borough within a major conurbation, and a large city. The three LEAs contrast in their approach to school development planning. When fieldwork began, the county had a compulsory development plan based upon the financial year which was in its third year of operation; the city's compulsory plan was based upon the academic year and was in its second year of operation; and the borough encouraged schools to participate voluntarily in its development plan initiative where schools could select from a range of ideas.

The first phase of data collection (in the autumn term 1990) consisted of 22 interviews with LEA officers, advisers, inspectors and trainers to identify the innovations being introduced in the schools and the LEAs' strategies for supporting and monitoring the implementation of these innovations. In addition interviews were conducted with 24 headteachers of multiracial primary schools (eight contrasting schools in each LEA) about a range of issues connected with development planning. Case studies are being carried out over the 1991/92 financial year in six reputationally effective schools from the original sample to explore in more detail how the planning process evolves over time. The initial findings are summarised in the following sections.

The range of contexts for planning

There were considerable variations in the school contexts. Multiracial schools were defined as schools with between 10% and 95% of pupils from ethnic minorities. In the survey schools the proportion of pupils from the ethnic minorities ranged from 16% to 93%. Overall, Asian pupils from the Indian subcontinent formed the largest group, followed by Afro-Caribbean pupils. All 24 schools were located in urban areas. About half served parents whose socioecomonic status was almost entirely working class while the remaining schools served a mixed population where there was a minority of middle class parents. The age of the buildings ranged from late Victorian to brand new accomodation. The sample included first, middle, combined and primary schools of medium to large size, catering for between 125 and 450 pupils. Two of the schools were voluntary aided: one Roman Catholic and one Anglican. The remainder were LEA maintained schools. Seventeen of the headteachers were women and their length of service ranged from six months to 14 years. Only two of the headteachers were from an ethnic minority group. These background factors affected planning in a number of ways. For example, the proportion of pupils for whom English was a second language was a key variable affecting teachers' work in the classroom because of the communication issues that were raised; older school buildings were most likely to cause maintenance problems.

The content of plans

In all cases planning for change took place alongside the planning that was required to maintain existing practice. Planning also took into account factors like occasional staff illness and local factors such as a chronic shortage of teachers. However, the most significant factor affecting planning for development was the wide range of innovations that the schools were addressing at any one time, many of which had been externally imposed. Innovations included those which:

- related to the context of cultural diversity (e.g. bids for support under Section 11, improving local community links, changes in the collective act of worship);
- constituted part of the planning process (e.g. compulsory school development plans, local management of schools);
- affected all primary schools (e.g. the National Curriculum and its assessment);
- reflected long term LEA concerns (e.g. two of the LEAs were reorganising their schools from a system of first, middle and high schools to a primary and secondary school system);
- represented an LEA response to local or school level issues (e.g. two schools were moved to temporary sites while buildings were being repaired or refurbished)

In all three LEAs planning for development was dominated by the central government reforms. Development plans completed in all the schools in the two LEAs where they

were compulsory provided a clear indication of priorities. Three quarters of the targets related to the 1988 Education Reform Act. Half covered National Curriculum subjects and an eighth addressed assessment and recording. Less than one eighth of the schools' development targets, such as the development of outdoor play areas, appeared unrelated to national or LEA innovations.

Planning for change in all the schools was frequently influenced by two factors connected with the availability of information about external innovations. First, planning was hindered for a time where staff and governors were aware that they had to introduce a particular innovation (such as appraisal or Key Stage One assessment) but lacked the information needed for its implementation. Second, on other occasions schools were forced to alter existing plans in response to spasmodic changes in information about the innovation. The content and timing of many such changes could not be predicted at school level. An instance occurred in the summer term 1991 when central government announced a radical reduction in the number of attainment targets in maths and science within the National Curriculum. Schools had to respond by

planning to alter records which they had recently developed to tie in with the original range of attainment targets set out by central government.

Development Plans

One of the main values of the development plans completed in two thirds of the schools was reported to be in focusing staff on shared priorities for development, although there was considerable variation in the extent to which staff had been involved in drawing up the plan (a finding which is consistent with other studies, such as Constable, Norton and Abbott 1991). In each school, several adjustments had been made to priorities in the development plan without altering the document itself, though in a minority of schools the written plan was used as a benchmark against which to review the progress that had been made with particular innovations during the course of the year. Additional priorities for development which had arisen since the development plan was compiled were omitted from the document and there was no requirement that the LEA should be informed. Headteachers and staff had been compelled to adjust their priorities to respond to changes in information about external innovations, to crises such as a leaking roof and issues like the need to replace staff in an area of teacher shortage.

The experience in one of the case study schools in the county LEA highlights the factors that can hinder the implementation of planned innovations. The headteacher was convinced of the value of development planning and both she and her staff were experienced in using the process. The school's plan for the academic year 1990/91 provided a framework for development activities through the year and was reviewed after the first six months. At this point the head and staff perceived that they were broadly on target in working towards their main goals. Nevertheless, several events had failed to take place and unanticipated developments had forced the staff to take action which had not been envisaged in the original plan. For example:

- staff training sessions and discussions about particular curriculum policies had to be postponed because of delays in the production of national guidelines;
- a school initiative to improve the discipline policy had not been pursued because of the pressure of other work;
- a Section 11 project had been postponed because the teacher appointed to run it had left after six weeks, leaving a vacancy which could not be filled for several months;
- the headteacher became pregnant and arrangements had to be made to manage the school in her absence on maternity leave;

- a series of changes in teaching policy had to be introduced because of changes in central government requirements.

The school development plan had been helpful in establishing a broad direction for change at the beginning of the year but had not removed the necessity for the headteacher and staff to create new plans as the year unfolded.

In the other case study school in this LEA, news that Home Office funding of a proposed Section 11 project had been refused caused a mid year crisis. The curriculum had been planned in the expectation that there would be three teachers working on multicultural support projects. Loss of anticipated funding meant that only two teachers would now be employed. Plans had to be readjusted in the light of this unwelcome information.

Seven of the eight heads interviewed in the borough had declined the invitation to participate in the LEA's development plan initiative because they believed that their existing planning procedures were reasonably effective. These schools were required to complete a less comprehensive National Curriculum development plan. It therefore appears that though a written development plan may be of some use to staff it is not an essential planning tool, as the following example indicates.

The headteacher and senior colleagues in one of the borough case study schools had developed their own approach to development planning which incorporated weekly monitoring of progress and the possibility of modifying plans in the light of contingencies that arose. At one of their weekly meetings, the management team (consisting of the three most senior staff) identified priorities, targets, staff responsible for implementation and deadlines for developments over the coming term. They took into account the demands of the school's National Curriculum development plan. A plan was compiled on a flipchart, setting out tasks and their timing for the management team and for other staff. The flipchart was kept on the wall of the headteacher's office. The management team reviewed this plan week by week, ticking off tasks completed, modifying others and adding new tasks. Thus this simple approach to development planning - with its minimal documentation compared with the twenty or more pages required by plans imposed on schools in the other LEAs - were more or less continually monitored and could be rapidly adjusted as required.

The attempt to complement this approach with a more comprehensive long term development plan involving all staff was itself affected by events which were unforeseeable at the time the initiative was launched. The school faced compulsory amalgamation at the end of the academic year with two other schools on the site. A working party led by the deputy head consulted all staff through a questionnaire to identify what they considered to be whole school priorities for development. The rationale was to place the staff in a strong position in the impending amalgamation process when plans for development would have to be negotiated with staff from the other two schools.

Work on this development plan was postponed after rainwater, which had leaked through the roof for some time, finally caused a crisis when it reached electricity cables. Staff and pupils were moved to two separate temporary sites while the roof was repaired. Members of the management team were split between the two sites. The head suggested to staff that they suspend staff meetings for the first month to enable them to concentrate upon settling into their new surroundings. Most teachers had to work in novel and unfavourable conditions. For example, one classroom was also the only indoor route between several classes and two teachers had to turn a large hall into two classrooms.

The teachers had been informed by LEA staff that they would move back to the original site within a month. However, they were unable to return for three months, during which time they restarted the development planning process, experiencing problems with meeting together because of the distance between sites. During this exceptionally difficult period, staff continued to be legally required to implement various central government reforms. Within a few weeks of the move back to the original site the LEA announced that the amalgamation would be now be postponed for a year. Under these circumstances, staff were forced repeatedly to modify their plans in the light of new priorities, not only for implementing several compulsory curriculum innovations, but also for the development planning innovation itself. For a couple of months strategic planning virtually broke down because of the range of uncertainties faced by staff and the over-riding new short term priority of coping with the move to (and later from) the temporary sites.

The central role of headteachers

The initial survey of headteachers suggested that they played a key role in the process of planning for development. They established management structures and roles whereby they could delegate some responsibility for planning the implementation of particular innovations. In two thirds of the schools staff had been allocated responsibitity for coordinating each subject in the curriculum while one third also had coordinators for year or phase groups of pupils. A minority of heads had created a team of senior staff to support them with strategic planning. Working parties of staff were convened in a few schools to plan for certain innovations.

Over three quarters of the heads reported acting on the one hand as innovators, initiating changes in line with their beliefs and values relating to management, curriculum, pedagogy, pastoral care, and the quality of the environment inside and outside the school. Examples of this activity were reorganising teaching spaces in an open plan school; introducing a system for giving specific help to pupils with a particular learning need; and setting up a tree planting programme in the school grounds. On the other hand two thirds of the heads reported that they also acted as defenders of their staff, primarily against what they perceived to be the negative impact of certain externally imposed innovations. Instances included choosing to delay the implementation of appraisal to avoid overburdening the staff; holding back non-statutory guidance on aspects of the National Curriculum to save staff from information overload; and delaying the changes that would have to be made if the National Curriculum requirements for history and geography were to be implemented.

The role of governors and parents

Governors appeared generally to play a minor role in initiating plans for development in the majority of the schools. About three quarters of the governing bodies were reported by heads to give active or passive support for initiatives proposed by the staff but not to take initiatives themselves. In three schools governors attempted to initiate changes or were in direct conflict with the head. However, the heads in two of these schools implied that they had been able to retain a considerable degree of control over the governors. Over half the governing bodies included members of ethnic minority groups. In those schools where this was not the case, headteachers reported having tried without success to persuade individuals from ethnic minority groups to become governors. Reasons given by heads for this failure included diffidence amongst members of ethnic minorities to put themselves forward, sometimes exacerbated by their limited command of the English language, and their work pattern precluding them from attending governors' meetings.

In general, school staff sought to inform parents about developments, rather than to gather their views on their preferences for change. Various approaches were employed to inform parents about school policies and practices. Heads generally had contact with

individual parents which provided opportunities for informal discussion, but reported that the annual governors' meeting for parents was not usually well attended. In most schools which had a high proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups, the headteachers reported that many of the parents (especially mothers who were muslims) had a limited command of the English language which made them reluctant to come into school to talk to the teachers.

The head of one case study school in the city had spearheaded a series of school based initiatives, gaining considerable financial and staffing support from the LEA, to build close links with the primarily muslim community. Many parents were illiterate both in English and in their mother tongue, having experienced very little formal education themselves. Innovations included a shared reading project: on one evening each week a teacher and a home-school liaison officer from the school visited the homes of pupils who needed extra support with reading. They taught parents or older brothers and sisters who were literate in the English language how to help the children with their reading. In addition, a regular reading workshop during the school day was organised where parents and children could learn to read together. An educational toy library was provided to help compensate for the lack of toys available for many pupils. Many parents either did not perceive the learning potential of educational toys or were unemployed and could not afford to buy them. Thus in this school, far from seeking parents' views about education, the staff made great efforts to help pupils' families to educate themselves and to participate in the children's learning according to the teachers' views of good practice.

There were few reports of major consultative exercises to gather the views of the parents. Heads believed in acknowledging the religion and culture of ethnic minority groups as far as was feasible within the requirements of central government legislation. A strong concern over guarding against racial discrimination amongst pupils was frequently expressed. A majority of the heads in the case study schools reported that on occasions a small minority of parents, from an ethnic minority group or not, expressed a wish that their children be educated through a more formal approach. The heads and teachers said that they usually responded to such requests, not by changing the style of pedagogy, but by attempting to persuade parents to accept their educational beliefs and values.

Emerging Hypotheses

Fieldwork to date suggests the following tentative hypotheses. First, the model of flexible planning appears broadly to fit the process of planning for development in the study schools: planning was based upon a continual process with spasmodic and cyclic elements. While long term plans were generally made, flexibility was retained by modifying these plans and making new plans as the need arose, especially in response to new information about external innovations.

Second, school development plans based upon an annual cycle may be misconceived in so far as they are intended to offer continuous support to schools. It seems unlikely that any school facing multiple, largely externally imposed innovations can centre its approach to planning for development primarily upon an annual cycle. The pattern of spasmodically shifting policies and consequent shifts in information about central government and LEA innovations for schools seems likely to continue, forcing staff to respond to changes that frequently cannot be predicted at school level. While occasional review and planning exercises may serve to focus staff upon certain priorities, they do not generally encompass changes that take place between these exercises. It is noteworthy that schools in the LEA without a compulsory development plan appeared to cope adequately without one.

Third, headteachers in primary sector schools appear to retain a considerable degree of control over development in primary schools to date despite central government reforms designed to increase the powers of governors and parents. Rather than seek the opinions of governors and parents, heads may inform them and, where necessary, attempt to persuade them to accept their educational and managerial beliefs and values.

Fourth, it is possible that the greater the environmental turbulence which forms the context of planning, the greater the emphasis upon planning as a continual process. In the six case study schools in phase two environmental turbulence varies from moderate to extreme. Data collection currently under way in these schools will enable this hypothesis to be investigated further.

Conclusions

Further research is required on the process of multiple change in a wider range of schools which are operating in a turbulent environment. As the present wave of reforms is implemented English schools are likely to become less constrained by central and local control over the content, process and timing of change efforts. Central government reforms are reducing the power of LEAs and it is intended to cut back on the number of national inspectors. One hypothesis that bears further investigation is that development planning processes will change as schools are freed from some present external controls (including the widespread demand that an annual school development plan must be completed as a framework for managing the implementation of multiple innovations).

School size may be a significant variable affecting development planning. Compared with other primary schools, those in the present research are all of medium to large size. Yet they are much smaller than most secondary schools. A second hypothesis which needs exploring is that the more complex the organisation the less the possibility of adopting a very flexible and responsive approach to development planning.

The initial research findings suggest that national and local policy makers should place less reliance upon an annual planning cycle; refrain from collecting information from schools that they may not use; clarify what minimal information is actually needed for accountability purposes; move to longer planning cycles; allocate funding for school projects (such as those for multicultural support) over a longer period of time; and change the existing arrangement for allocating school budgets according to the financial year, which conflicts with planning traditionally based upon the academic year.

Practitioners in schools should consider developing a flexible approach to development planning based upon a continual process of creating, monitoring and readjustment of plans. Occasional formal exercises to specify broad goals should be coupled with the recognition that the plans for achieving them are likely to be altered in the light of new information on external innovations, and other crises or long term issues. Efforts to manage the planning process should therefore include establishing both regular procedures for formal review and procedures for a less formal and rapid review whenever new information implies that existing plans will need modification or new plans will have to be made.

Postscript

The focus of our research was selected to address issues connected with the management of planned change. However, it should also be noted that multiracial primary schools in England are concentrated in inner city areas. A recent discussion paper commissioned by central government (Alexander et al 1992) highlighted how 'two thirds of the inner city schools (compared with one third nationally) had significant proportions of disadvantaged pupils'. The initial research findings suggest that the central government strategy for introducing innovations, when coupled with local

factors such as unforeseeable crises, has imposed severe constraints on the capacity of such schools to plan coherently in order to implement these innovations. Is it justifiable for central government to impose the greatest innovation load upon schools whose pupils and parents have the most pressing educational needs, so potentially threatening their education and hence potential for social mobility?

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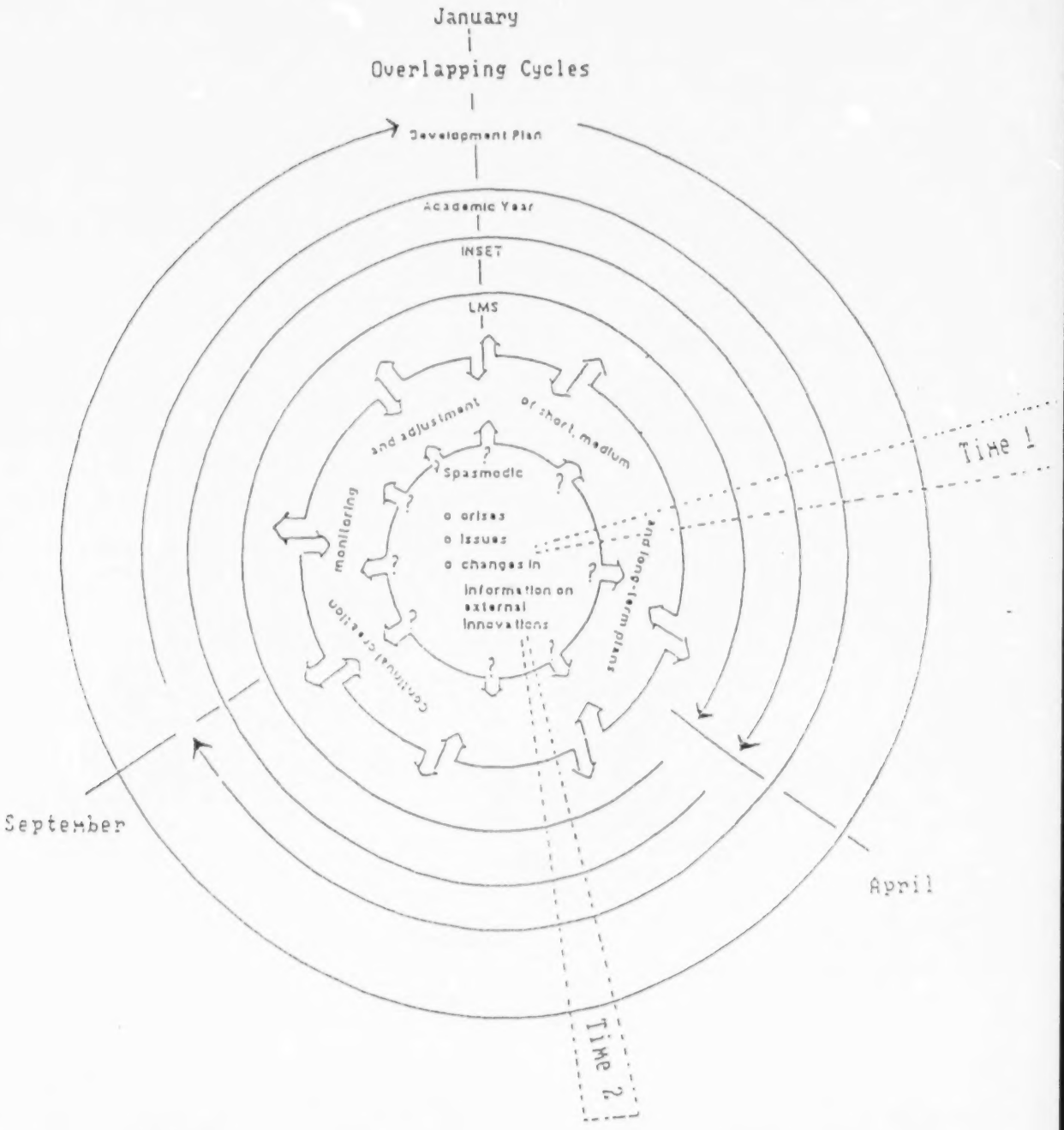
Figure 1 Flexible planning



INSET = Inservice Education for Teachers

LMS = Local Management of Schools